

# Community Colleges Offer Baby Boomers An Encore

**TEXT HERE  
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**FOR MILLIONS OFF AMERICANS, ENTERING THEIR MID-LIVES WILL BE AN OPPORTUNITY** to reinvent themselves like never before with new careers, hobbies and lifelong learning opportunities. As they seek the credentials and training they need to move into new careers and to enter the next chapter in their lives, baby boomers are flocking to postsecondary institutions in droves.

## **What Do Baby Boomers Want?**

A 2005 MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures New Face of Work Survey found that many baby boomers are eager to make career changes that can launch a new chapter in their working lives while they make social contribution. The survey found that 50 percent of Americans age 50 to 70 want jobs that contribute to the greater good. It found that more than 53 percent of this population plan to work in retirement because they need continued income, and they want greater flexibility in retirement jobs. Fifty-six percent reported an interest in working in health care, whether that be in a hospital or with an organization fighting a particular disease; 55 percent reported interest in a teaching or other educational position; and 45 percent say they are interested in working in a youth program. Getting baby boomers the education and training they need to enter fields such as health care, education and social services, is one way to address worker shortages in those sectors.

## **The Role of Community Colleges**

The nation's 1,200 community colleges are taking notice of baby boomers. They are working to develop new programs and to

strengthen existing ones in order to meet the growing needs of mid-lifers. Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC), a large urban two-year college located in Mecklenburg, North Carolina, is developing programming dedicated to people seeking an encore career. It recently secured \$25,000 in grant funding from think tank Civic Ventures and the MetLife Foundation. Through its Encore Career Project, Civic Ventures seeks to invest in innovation on community college campuses; highlight the role colleges can play in the lives of those in a new stage of life and work; and encourage those institutions and other stakeholders to help unleash the potential of baby boomers as a new workforce. CPCC, one of 10 Civic Ventures grantees this year, will develop its From Success to Significance training program to help baby boomers transition into encore careers within the health care, social service and nonprofit sectors.

## **CPCC's From Success to Significance Offers Career Transition**

When From Success to Significance is piloted, it will offer baby boomers four components: A Career Transitions Workshop, Individual Career Counseling and Assessment, Encore Careers in the Non-profit Arena Workshops, and Mentor Triad support teams. A program proposal notes the series will be developed and implemented by a partnership of employers, educators and career change experts. "From Success to Significance engages participants in a series of activities that identifies and builds individual skills and talents, while providing new job-competency-based skills needed to succeed in purpose-driven work," according to a report. The program will be offered twice during the pilot year and will enroll 10 baby

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boomers per session. At the end of the one-year grant period, the college expects that about 50 percent of participants will either have secured employment or have identified areas to pursue within the health care, social services, nonprofit or education sectors. Tony Zeiss, president of CPCC, recently noted, "Community colleges are poised to become the primary vehicles that help to unleash the important knowledge and social capital that our communities and employers desperately need."

CPCC isn't new in developing targeted programming for older Americans. In 2006, the college established the Lifetime Learning Institute for mid-life individuals and their employers. The institute offers an array of services, including information about education and workforce development for those 45-60. Lori Alexander, associate dean in CPCC's Office of Instruction, said that a lot of the programming being offered is based on overwhelming market research showing a great need. The baby boomer market, she says, can be sliced in a lot of ways. But one very visible group is comprised of mid-lifers who won't be retiring anytime soon because they need the money. Another group of baby boomers want to reinvent their lives by finding careers that are more flexible and meaningful to their lives and their communities. "The bottom line is that a lot of people are in a self-reflective mode," Alexander said, and this is a major characteristic of the baby boomer generation.

### **Lifelong Learning A Key Aspect of Baby Boomers' New Chapter**

Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C), located in Ohio's greater Cleveland area, has been offering individuals 55 and older lifelong learning opportunities for more than 30 years. The college opened in 1963 and was Ohio's first community college. Today more than 55,000 credit and noncredit students attend Tri-C each year, at three traditional campuses, two corporate college locations, 50-plus off-campus sites, and via television and the Internet. Tri-C's Center for Aging Initiatives offers

learning opportunities through its Encore Campus and Road Scholar programs.

The Encore Campus gives its students a vast array of classes in education, the arts, business, and health and wellness. Each of Tri-C's six campuses-located in downtown Cleveland, Parma, Westlake and Highland Hills-gears programming toward a specific target audience. Eileen Yates, director of the center, said the college's computer technology classes are of particular interest



to baby boomers; but they aren't attending classes to learn how to use computers. They want to learn how to use software such as Adobe Photoshop and conduct genealogy research. This fall, Tri-C will debut the innovative Road Scholar program, which will bring education programming into the community. The college, in cooperation with community partners, will be taking the show on the road as it brings educational and other programming to

community centers in three cities in the greater Cleveland area. Community centers have long been a place for residents to get health and wellness programming; but they have lacked any significant education programming. Yates says that Road Scholar will embrace this new frontier in delivery making it easier for residents to participate in lifelong learning without having to go too far.

### **Looking Ahead**

Shortages in fields such as health care are expected to get worse in the coming years. Seven health care occupations are listed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics among the top 10 fastest growing through 2014. And community colleges are at the frontline in providing workers with skills they need to enter those occupations. For aspirant educators, community colleges are providing alternative routes to certification making it easier for those making the transition from other fields. Perhaps transitioning baby boomers may be the answer to help provide the skilled workers needed to fulfill the growing needs in both these sectors.

The American Association of Community Colleges has expressed an interest in replicating a national model of From Success to Significance. At the very least the outcomes of the program (after the one-year grant period) will be shared

with a consortium of community colleges and workforce development boards from 16 counties in North and South Carolina. These are exciting times for baby boomers. Choices abound, there are no limits to what they can achieve, and they will continue to be an integral part of the 21st century workforce. No doubt community colleges are rising to the occasion; they are providing this population with the education and training they need to lead the full and prosperous lives that they want to live. ■